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SUBJECT: NEPALI GOVERNMENT DECLARES AVIAN INFLUENZA
CONTAINED

REF: KATHMANDU 000063

Summary

1. (U) On February 20, the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives announced that another case of H5N1 avian influenza has been detected. The announcement came 11 days after the Ministry declared that Nepal's first outbreak of H5N1 avian influenza has been contained and controlled and slightly more than a month after the outbreak was first announced at an emergency cabinet meeting. Since the Government of Nepal (GON) launched its control efforts, nearly 30,000 birds in the affected area in the southeastern part of the country, along the border with India, have been culled, according to government officials. Despite the success of its control efforts, the GON cautioned that further outbreaks are still possible because the illegal poultry trade continues to flourish, and it acknowledged that current resources would be insufficient for controlling future outbreaks if they occur simultaneously in several areas.

Government Declares Avian Influenza "Contained"

2. (U) On February 20, local media reported that the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives had announced that the H5N1 strain of avian influenza had been detected in a chicken collected in a village in Jhapa district, which is where the initial outbreak occurred. The bird reportedly had been imported from India. On February 9, Pravakar Pathak, director general of Livestock Services at the Ministry said, "We have controlled and contained the bird flu outbreak." Nepal's first outbreak of H5N1 avian influenza was announced at an emergency cabinet meeting on January 16. The announcement was made after laboratory tests confirmed that six of seven dead chickens found about a week earlier in Mechinagar Municipality in Jhapa district, on the southeast border with India, died of avian flu. The GON immediately declared the area within a three-kilometer radius of the Mechinagar customs station a Bird Flu Emergency Area in which all poultry would be culled, all poultry products would be destroyed and all poultry farm tools and equipment disinfected. A surveillance zone extending 10 kilometers beyond the emergency zone was also established.

3. (U) Working closely with the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), USAID and other international agencies, the GON began its control efforts in the affected area on January 18. Culling operations were carried out by 10 Rapid Response

Teams, each comprising five members who had been trained by the GON with support from FAO and USAID. After culling operations were completed in the emergency zone, they were expanded into the neighboring surveillance zone. GON officials reported that, as of January 23, 29,620 birds had been culled in the two zones, including 23,947 chickens. Nearly 5,000 eggs and 345 kilograms of poultry feed had also been destroyed.

14. (SBU) There is some concern that the GON has been underreporting the extent of the outbreak. Until February 20, it had reported no infections beyond the original six confirmed deaths. However, international agencies working with the GON report had provided USAID with information that indicates there have been 10 to 14 confirmed cases of H5N1 avian influenza, not including the latest announced by the Ministry. Three persons had been kept under observations for a week on suspicion of contracting the deadly disease, but no cases of avian flu have been diagnosed in humans, according to the Department of Health Services and WHO. The GON declared avian flu &contained8 even as its control operations continued in the surveillance zone. Many areas in the zone can only be reached on foot. Control operations have also been slowed by a lack of trained personnel and the nature of the poultry farming in Nepal, where the majority of birds are raised in backyards, not on commercial farms. The GON,s aim is to declare the affected zones a &Bird Flu Free Area,8 which, according to international health standards, means no remnant of the avian influenza virus should be found in the area within 90 days of the initial outbreak, or about two months after the GON's announcement that the outbreak has

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been "controlled and contained."

Further Outbreaks Still Possible

5 (U) During the February 9 press conference at which avian influenza was declared &contained and controlled,8 Dr. Manash Banarji, coordinator of the Avian Influenza Control Project under the Ministry of Health and Population, cautioned that further outbreaks remain possible. He pointed out that, even though the GON had banned the production, consumption, sale and transportation of poultry products in Jhapa district, the illegal poultry trade continues to flourish due to the porous border with India. Dr. Banarji added that its recent experience has left the GON well positioned to combat future outbreaks. However, in a recent media interview, Livestock Services Director General Pathak, said that if outbreaks occur simultaneously in more than two places, "then our resources and manpower are inadequate." He explained that government faces a "critical shortage" of manpower, especially veterinarians.

Outbreak Leaves Poultry Industry Reeling

6 (U) The recent out of avian influenza has left Nepal,s NR 17-billion (USD \$220 million) poultry industry reeling. Iswore Sharma, President of Poultry Farming Entrepreneurs Association, told the media that poultry production has plummeted by 70 percent since the GON announced the avian influenza outbreak.

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